

get my uniform. It was just as well that I was not expected to become a 'glamour boy' because I was given a thick woollen khaki uniform which fitted rather poorly on my slight frame, a pair of large, heavy tan boots, a slouch hat and a 'giggle suit.' This last was an unglamorous and shapeless working dress made of khaki drill. Of course, I had to put on the uniform at once to parade in front of the family and I broke in the boots by filling them with water and walking around for a few hours so that when they dried they would be moulded to the shape of my feet.



*The Sydney University
Regiment training in
1939.*

The examinations ended in early December and, almost immediately, the regiment went into camp at Ingleburn, near Liverpool, for three months. Entraining at Central Station, some hundreds of very eager young men shouted and joked all the way to Ingleburn, which was then a tiny village miles outside the city boundary. Under the hot December sun we marched the mile and a half up the hill to the wooden huts of the camp and were immediately sent off to the hospital to be inoculated.

The inoculation parade was a good example of army life! We were given nothing to eat but just lined up in the hot sun, given a vaccination and an injection in each arm and then set to work. The needles were blunt and several of the would-be soldiers fainted.

Army life turned out to be far from comfortable. We slept on

the floor on straw palliasses with blankets but no sheets, ate badly cooked food prepared in the usual great army boilers by reluctant cooks and spent the hot summer days in weapon drill — using old .303 Lee Enfield rifles, Lewis machine guns and 3 inch mortars from World War I — and in dozens of exercises. We would march out of camp early in the bright morning — after having been awakened by the regiment's Scottish pipe band marching up and down the line of huts. Then, clad in our dirty giggle suits, we spent endless hours of the hot days marching along roads, crawling through the long dry grass — which always seemed to get up my nose — clambering through barbed wire fences, running up hills where our leather soled boots slipped on the dry grass, digging trenches, filling them in and then repeating the exercise somewhere else. Occasionally we took part in a mock battle with other battalions and I soon found that it was better to be ‘shot’ early on for then I could sleep or doze in a dry creek bed under the casuarinas while the unwounded toiled across the landscape, dripping with perspiration, the flies crawled over them as their weapons got ever hotter and heavier.

It was not an unhealthy life and at night I slept like a log. But I soon found it boring. The regiment was unlikely ever to go to the war. Where was the glamour of service life? Sometimes the routines were varied but they did little to make me happier for they mainly consisted of being on guard duty for a couple of days at a time. Never have I known time to go so slowly as when I stood at the headquarters guard in the very early hours of the morning armed with a rifle and bayonet, but no ammunition, constantly imagining that shadows were moving and hardly crediting that time could go so slowly.

What I did like was the practice at the range where the rifle kicked against my shoulder and the long route marches with the lads singing as they marched, the bivouacs under the stars, sometimes in vineyards heavy with grapes and the pay of five shillings a day — by far the most money I had ever had.

Towards the end of the camp I was promoted to the rank of

acting lance corporal but this mighty promotion hardly went to my head and I began to think seriously of trying, once again, to get my father to let me enlist, preferably in the air force but, failing that, in the navy. Both airmen and sailors seemed to live a considerably more civilised life than the poor infantryman. Among heat, sweat, flies, poor and hard living the imagined attractions of the AIF were fading fast.

In March 1941, now somewhat more self confident, I returned to the university and resumed living with my parents and brother, existing frugally on pocket money of two shillings per week. Several of my friends went into the services and, when they came to university in uniform, I felt both jealous and restless.

The navy continued to advertise for wireless operators and, desperate to get away to the war, I tried again to get my father's permission to enlist. I wasn't really surprised when he refused, but I was amazed when, not long afterwards, he agreed that I could join the RAAF as an aircrew trainee, provided that the air force would defer my call-up until the end of the year, by which time I would be 19 and have finished second year at the university.

I passed the ridiculously strict medical examination and then, as I could not enter the service until the end of the year, I started doing the set of 21 lessons. These were a very well designed set on mathematics, electricity, airmanship, meteorology, etc., which cut down the time needed at the Initial Training Schools and kept up the interest of the volunteers. Twice a week I went to classes at the Lane Cove Public School. I had no difficulty in coping with the work, although it was unfamiliar. What I did find hard was summoning up enough enthusiasm to work hard for a distinction at university. I needed the distinction so that, when I returned from the war, I could do an honours degree. That there might be no 'after the war' was something that I did not think about. Already one of my school friends, Roy Bothwell, had been killed in the Middle East while serving on No. 3 squadron but I was a firm believer of the 'It couldn't happen to me' school.



Flying Officer Percival Roy Bothwell's grave at Halfaya Sollum War Cemetery, Tobruk. Roy Bothwell was shot down in his Curtiss Tomahawk by ground fire on 26 November 1941. He was found still strapped in his seat, but all his pockets had been stripped along with his watch. He was 20 years old.

After what seemed an endless countdown the longed for day finally came. The morning of 6 December 1941 in Sydney was clear, cloudless and warm as I walked through the Botanic Gardens to the reception centre at Woolloomooloo. I felt some trepidation but it was overwhelmed by the excitement of the day, for I looked on joining the RAAF as possibly the greatest adventure of my life — which indeed it turned out to be.

It was not long before reality intruded into my dreams of heroism as I swept in on the tail of a Messerschmitt or ploughed through the sky at the controls of my Wellington bomber.

The Initial Training School at Bradfield, on the North Shore near Lindfield, was a large collection of simple, unlined wooden huts surrounded by a high wire fence. It was no hotel but we were given beds rather than straw mattresses and the food was good. After Ingleburn it was pure luxury. What brought me up short was the first task we were given. Unlike the army, we were not vaccinated at once but, instead, were ushered into a large room where we were made to sit down and make our wills.

I had never consciously thought of making a will — for, at that time, I owned nothing at all — and I suddenly realised that perhaps this adventure was to be a ‘game for keeps.’ For the first time in my life I really considered that I might not have very long to live.

As the new entrants on No. 23 course of the Empire Air Training scheme, we would normally have been the butt of the camp until No. 24 course arrived the following month. But the next

morning the camp was agog with the news that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbour and that, at last, the Americans were in the war.

Tension with the Japanese had been building up steadily through the 1930s and it was no surprise to the trainees, or indeed to most Australians, that they had finally attacked. The only persons who seemed surprised and discomfited were the far left members of the federal ALP such as the famous — or to many people the infamous — Eddie Ward and his friends.

I enjoyed my stay at Bradfield. It was only a few miles from home and occasionally I would get under the wire — with the connivance of the sentry and walk home. My favourite and much loved cousin, Frances, had joined the WAAAF and was in the adjoining camp so we often saw one another. I enjoyed the academic work and found most of it to be quite easy. But I gradually shifted my ground about becoming a pilot because increasingly it seemed to me that the most interesting job in aircrew belonged to the navigator. At the aircrew category selection board, because I was a student and so thought to be academic, I was finally able to have myself allocated for training as a navigator rather than as a pilot — something that I never regretted.



Frances 'Francie' Mary Scott (1923-1947) served in the Women's Australian Auxillary Air Force (WAAAF). She died at age 23 from liver cancer.

The rapid, almost unbelievably swift advance of the Japanese in the early months of 1942 quickly brought first concern and then

fear to Australia. The Bradfield camp became steadily more warlike with the erection of a large tower for spotting aircraft, the digging of air raid trenches and sudden dispersals on the air raid signal when we all headed down the hill into the thick bush along the Lane Cove River. The training program was put back by some weeks and it was not until May that I got out of the train at Cootamundra to join No.1 Air Observers' School — for at that time navigators were still known by the World War title of Observer.

It was a cold, bright morning with frost thick on the ground and, as the train drew away, I became aware that the air was thunderous with the roar of half a dozen Avro Ansons taking off. I strained my eyes to see them and as, one by one, they passed overhead I thought with delight that in a few days time I, too, would be flying.



*Avro Ansons in flight.
11,020 were built
between 1935-1952.
Australia flew 1028
Ansons. They were
retired from the RAAF in
1955.*

I had never lived in a country town before. To me, Cootamundra, with its wide streets, its Victorian houses with iron lacework on the verandahs, its park with huge exotic trees and its large railway station, was a new and very pleasant experience. The nights were freezing cold but the stars seemed twice as big as in Sydney and I would sometimes lie awake listening happily to the whistling of the great steam locomotives and the rumble of the wagons as they went past the camp. The people in the town were

friendly and even seemed to like their young guests — for it was rare to find a trainee much over 25 years of age. They certainly did their best to make us feel welcome.

This was just as well for the camp was anything but a happy place under the command of Group Captain Philip Graham — inevitably known to the trainees as ‘Phil the Dill.’ He was a permanent RAAF officer who had a mania for smartness. Not only were all uniforms and kit expected to be immaculate — which was no easy job as we were once again on palliasses in unlined huts — but the huts were surrounded by gardens of military precision outlined by white washed bricks and every trainee was compelled to run everywhere in the camp. I bitterly resented being made to run and walked whenever I thought that I could get away with it. Ten years later, Phil Graham became one of my students in the Air Traffic Control School and I had much pleasure in returning some of his pleasantries.

Navigation was still far from being an exact science but I enjoyed studying it. After learning to do dead reckoning plots on the ground — the so-called ‘dry swims’ — we were finally allowed to get airtime to practise it in the air. As I climbed into my flying suit, pulled on my flying boots and put together my chart, topographical maps, dividers, pencils and computer, I was very happy but rather worried. I had coped on the ground, but what would it be like in the air? After all, the aircraft could not stop while I caught up with my plotting. I might get lost and be humiliated. I need not have worried for once we were on course I was far too busy for anxiety. In any case, as I found out, the pilot had been over the route so many times that he could have flown it blindfold. As the weeks went by I became quite confident in my ability to find the little towns and villages which were the turning points on the triangular routes and rarely suffered the sneers of the bored pilots who only wished to go off to the war. As we progressed to night flying, the pressure increased. Without the railways and roads to guide us, we lumbered through the night sky, crouched under the dim light over the navigation table and

anxiously looked out for the glow of distant towns to fix our position. On a cloudy night we were sometimes in real bother and I realised that, if night navigation was this difficult in Australia it would be much worse in Europe, let alone New Guinea!

The Avro Anson, that I had so admired on the seemingly distant day in 1938, was a wondrous piece of work. It was developed some time in the 1930s in the transition period from biplanes to monoplanes and from wooden to metal construction. As a result, it was an underpowered, twin-engined wooden monoplane with a retractable undercarriage which had to be wound up and down by hand — 141 laborious turns in all. It carried a crew of four and was equipped with, of all things, a hand-operated turret containing one .303 machine gun. As a machine of war I cannot imagine that it frightened anyone but it had the virtues of stability and safety and was perfect as a training aircraft.

I spent three happy months at Cootamundra, paying little attention to the progress of the war, even as the situation became critical, with the fall of Port Moresby expected daily and frequent bombing attacks on Darwin. When Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour it seemed that an invasion was near and some of the city's residents fled to the country.



On 8 June 1942, the Japanese submarine I-24 fired ten shells at the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Nine landed in the Eastern Suburbs and one in the harbour. Only one shell detonated. The rest were recovered by army unexploded bomb experts. On the 11 June 1943, I-24 was depth-charged and rammed by the USS Larchmont and sunk with 104 officers and men near Alaska.

My only concession to the panic, which gripped some people, was, on one of my short leaves, to dig an air-raid shelter in the middle of the back lawn at home. As the ground was nearly impenetrable clay, it was hard work and, as soon as it rained, we had a small, covered swimming pool in which we would have drowned. Yet, even in the darkest days, I never had any doubt that the Allies would win the war. My only fear was that they might win it before I arrived at the battle.

Unlike many of the other trainees I led a very quiet life in Cootamundra. Its highlights were usually a meal at the Globe Hotel in the town and Sunday evening at church where I much admired Cherie, the prettiest girl in town, without ever having the courage to speak to her.

I soon became blasé about flying — until I had my first flying accident. One afternoon, while these trainees who were not flying were lined up on parade, the aircraft in which I was to do a cross country exercise, turned into the wind, the pilot released the brakes and we roared off across the grass — for it was still an all-over field with no runways. Besides the staff pilot, on board were three trainees — one sitting beside the pilot, one at the plotting table while I sat at the radio set towards the stern.

Ansons did not exactly leap into the air but this one seemed slower than usual. By the time it was three quarters of the way across the airfield, it was still firmly on the grass. Any sensible pilot would have pulled up to find out what was wrong but ours kept on going and hoping. By the time we reached the edge of the field we were going quite quickly but we had not unstuck. We should have been killed but, instead of piling into an untidy mess in the next field, the aircraft hit a sloping bank of earth some six feet high and immediately climbed steeply to about 150 feet. At that point it stalled and, nosing over, headed straight for the ground.

Up to that point I had been too fascinated by what was going on to have any fear but now I suddenly thought, with alarm, “We’re going to prang.” Fear and excitement churned inside me. As we

headed towards the ground, the pilot managed to pull up the nose somewhat but we had no chance of avoiding an accident and a moment or so later there was a great crunching and tearing sound as we hit the ground. Amazingly, although the engines were ripped out and the nose disintegrated, I was the only casualty. There, in Cootamundra, in July 1942, thousands of miles from the battle zones, I received my only war wound. Despite wearing a lap strap, I was flung forward on to the radio and received a cut above my left eye. Although it bled profusely I was in much better shape than the airmen who had watched the accident from the parade ground and had run half a mile across the airfield expecting either to render aid to the victims or to pull out the dead. I was shaken but flying again the next day.

When the course finished at Cootamundra and we had all had our ‘intercourse leave,’ we moved up the promotion ladder to Leading Aircraftsman. Not only were we now entitled to wear a propeller on our sleeve but our pay increased from six to ten shillings per day. Suddenly, I found myself (comparatively) wealthy. This was not surprising as I neither smoked nor drank and, apart from my cousins, I hardly knew a girl. I would have liked to have been a dashing young airman — but I didn't even know how to begin to go about it.

At that stage of the war all navigators were trained as bomb aimers as well, so, after a few days luxuriating in the comforts of home, I was off to Evans Head, a base right on the coast near Lismore in the far north of New South Wales. In mid-winter it was pleasant with a beautiful climate and miles of unspoilt beaches. Its only drawback was that it was almost surrounded by a swamp from which the camp drew its water and which smelled badly of sulphuretted hydrogen so that after a shower you smelled worse than before.

The aircraft used for bombing and gunnery training could hardly have been less suitable — at least for bombing. They were Fairey Battle day bombers — a type which had been quite unable to survive in the Battle of France and was then relegated to training.

Powered by one Rolls Royce Merlin, the Battle had a long ‘glass house’ at the rear of which the gunner stood, clutching one gas-operated .303 machine gun on a ring. Bombing was an experience in itself. The unfortunate bomb aimer lay flat on his belly in the middle of the aircraft peering out of a square open hatch and trying to judge the release point using the old and primitive course-setting bomb sight. The hole was large enough to fall through and things were made worse by the requirement that he put his legs out of a hole which had been cut further aft for an under belly gun. This meant that the bomb aimer balanced on his middle while trying to peer down the hole, every so often getting some engine coolant in his face and trying to communicate with the pilot over a primitive intercom system. Every time the aircraft lurched the bomb aimer made a frantic grab for something to hold on to. Some unfortunates had really blotted their copy book by grabbing the release of the bomb sight so that the bomb sight fell away instead of the bomb.



A Fairey Battle. Australia received 364 Battles. They were nearly all used as training aircraft after their disastrous debut in the Battle of France in 1940.

I tried hard, but I was never more than a slightly below average bomb aimer — a fact which caused me little worry.

After a month we went on to gunnery training — and my second close encounter with death. One morning another trainee and I were sent up to fire at a drogue being towed by another aircraft. We each had on a parachute harness but we could not wear the chest pack while we were firing. We were supposed to have a monkey strap tied on to prevent us falling out but the straps were broken. When we had been airborne for about ten minutes and were at 4000 feet with no sign of the target aircraft appearing, the pilot became bored and

decided to do some aerobatics — for, of all things, the Battle was fully aerobatic. He did not tell us but just put the nose down steeply to build up speed and then pulled up into a loop.



The rear gunner in a Fairey Battle was not securely restrained!

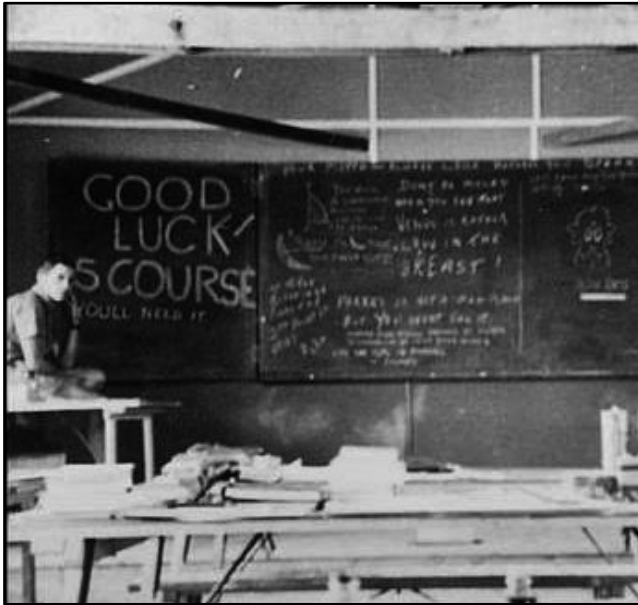
We were very frightened as we turned upside down but the centrifugal force held us in until the pilot rolled the aircraft at the top of the loop. The other trainee was caught in the top of the glasshouse but I popped out of the aircraft like a cork out of a bottle, desperately clutching the coaming with my fingers. My right leg, from the knee down, was wedged under the edge but the rest of me was out in the breeze unable to do anything. Outside the aircraft, with the wind tearing at me and my fingers slowly slipping on the aluminium, no great thoughts rushed through my mind. I did not even resent the fact that I was about to die. I was simply numbed with terror and my mind was a blank. Then the aircraft came the right way up and I fell in. The other trainee, ashen-faced, grabbed hold of me and we clung together until we landed. I was too shaken to abuse the pilot and, such is the resilience of youth, I was flying again a few hours later.

After Evans Head it was on to Parkes in the mid-west of NSW for training in astro-navigation. Once again flying in Ansons, we blundered around the night sky trying to catch elusive stars in the sextant bubble and, at least as far as I was conceded, hoping never to have to use the system on operations.

Although I was getting much nearer to taking an active part in the war, I thought little of it. Rather I concentrated on the miseries of living in Parkes — abominable food, poor bedding, being up all night in very cold weather and enduring a series of red dust storms which

covered everything in dust and grit while the sun was hidden and it was hard to breath.

But, at last, it was over. In October 1942 I was given my observer's wing and promoted to sergeant at a pay rate of 16 shillings a day. I was happy to sew the three chevrons on my sleeves but even more, the observer's badge on my chest. I used to forget that I had it, then looking down I was suddenly thrilled when I saw it standing out large and white against the navy blue of my tunic.



A trainee at the RAAF Astro Navigation school, Parkes, 1942, sits on a desk. The blackboard is filled with advice to the next course.



To the War

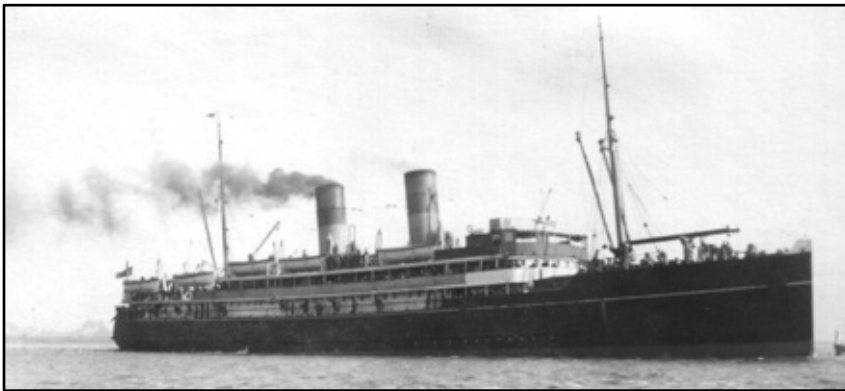
Outwardly, I was now a fully qualified navigator but, inwardly, I appreciated how little I knew and I was apprehensive about being responsible for the navigation of a large aircraft at night over enemy territory when there would be no illuminated towns or beacons to help me find my way. However, I did not let this spoil my enjoyment of the present and I was very happy to walk around Sydney as a ‘blue orchid’ and think of my friends in the Sydney University Regiment who had not volunteered for overseas service. They had been conscripted and the regiment turned into an anti-aircraft unit, which was sent to a God-forsaken place called Merauke in Dutch New Guinea where, among the heat and mud, they rotted for much of the war.

What did concern me was whether I would now be posted to a squadron in New Guinea or go to England to join the other Australians flying with the RAF. I was never in any doubt as to where I wanted to go. From childhood I had been steeped in British history and remember the pangs I felt, in the middle of 1941 when, walking home across the Harbour Bridge, a large liner passed underneath carrying hundreds of aircrew on their way to Canada and England. In the late afternoon I could hear their cheers faintly and see their blue uniforms. That the majority of them were destined never to return was something that I did not realise. All I knew was that I wanted to follow them.

Back in camp after embarkation leave I found that only a few men were posted to New Guinea and that I was one of the great

majority who were to go to England. With no real idea of what the future was to hold I went home, full of excitement, to tell my parents. It was truly harrowing for them. Well educated by the horrific casualties of World War I, they had no illusions that they might be saying goodbye to me forever. But they were truly stoic. When the morning for departure came, they gave me a little New Testament with their photograph in the back, then my father shook my hand more firmly and for longer than usual before he went off to work. I said goodbye to my fourteen year old brother, John. Then, with my mother, I walked up the street to the bus stop on the highway where, without crying, she gave me a long hug when a car stopped to give me a lift to camp.

A few hours later a double-decker bus picked us up at Bradfield and, as we drove down the Pacific Highway, I looked over the paddock and the houses to my little home nestling in the valley. I suddenly realised that this might be the last time I would ever see the home that had sheltered me almost all my life. But, at just 20, I was much too young to feel depressed for more than a moment and soon I was laughing and joking with the rest on the uncomfortable troop train to Melbourne.



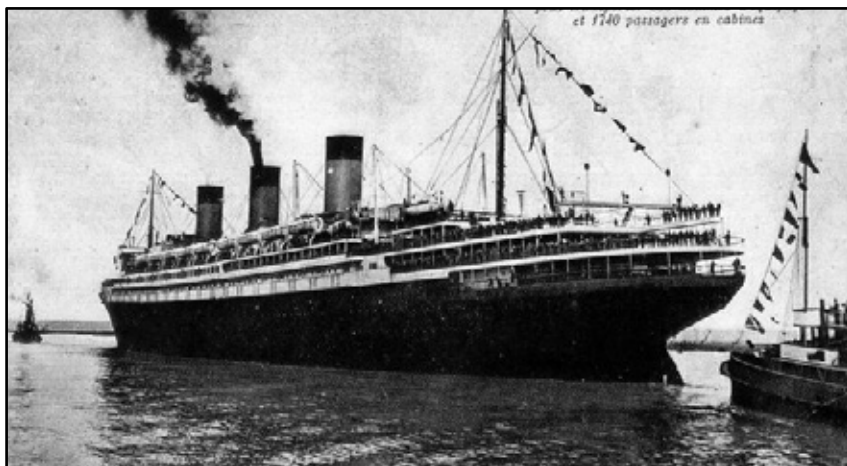
SS Nairana was laid down in 1915 as a merchant ship. The Royal Navy converted it to a sea plane carrier. It saw action in Russia and then in 1920 was brought to Australia where it served on the Bass Strait run until being scrapped in 1951.

We had expected to sail direct from Melbourne but, after a couple of days at the Show Ground, sleeping on straw palliasses in the Dog Pavilion and looking at the great signs on the roof which exhorted all Australians to ‘Populate or Perish,’ we were taken down to Port Melbourne to board the *SS Nairana*. I knew that it was the ferry to Tasmania but some of the troops were at first convinced, and horrified, that they were being sent across the world in such a little boat.

I suppose there are smooth crossings of the strait but I have never had one. We had hardly cleared Port Phillip Heads when the first man became sick and soon dozens were ill. I have always been a good sailor and I thoroughly enjoyed my first voyage. Next morning we landed at Devonport and boarded the little narrow gauge train to go to Hobart. Rattling and bumping all day through the beautiful countryside I fell in love with Tasmania. Late in the afternoon we reached the army camp at Brighton about ten miles outside Hobart and there we just waited and waited until I began to appreciate the first part of the old saying that, ‘War is 99% boredom and 1% terror.’

The days seemed long, but, after three days, we were suddenly told to pack, then loaded on to the train and taken down to the great harbour. There we saw our ship, the 44,000 ton French liner, the *Ile de France*, berthed at King's Wharf. She was not the biggest ship I had seen for earlier I had viewed, with awe, the great 80,000 ton liners, the *Queen Mary* and the *Queen Elizabeth* as they lay in Sydney Harbour waiting to take on troops. But the *Ile de France* was a huge vessel and I was somewhat overawed as I carried my kitbag up the gangway.

We were to use troop bunks but, no sooner had we boarded than it was discovered that they were ‘lousy’ — the result of carrying Italian prisoners of war from the Middle East. Still on board were some hundreds of German prisoners of war who were being taken from Egypt to the United States guarded by troops from a British regiment, the Green Howards.



A 1927 postcard of the Ile de France. A ship of 44,000 tons it was launched in 1927.. It was considered one of the most beautifully appointed ships of all time. After being commandeered as a troopship by the British Admiralty in 1940, all the appointments were stripped out. The ship was scrapped in Japan in 1959.

Most of the Germans were from the Afrika Corps and had been taken prisoner at the first battle of El Alamein when the German advance on Egypt came to a final halt. They were mostly young — in fact I got to know a Luftwaffe rear gunner from a Ju87 (a Stuka). He was still only seventeen — and quite convinced that Germany would win the war. We had much pleasure in relaying to them the news of the massive German defeats at Stalingrad and El Alamein but they refused to believe it. Like most prisoners they showed an amazing ingenuity and, in a sudden search by the troops, a great variety of home-made weapons was unearthed. Every day they were brought up on deck for exercise and were watched by soldiers with machine guns trained on them. There was absolutely no camaraderie between the prisoners and the soldiers whose regiment had suffered badly in the desert.

After the bunks had been found to be lousy the non-commissioned aircrew were put into hammocks, which we rather

Arthur Hoyle DFC

enjoyed. A couple of hours later, with the sun sinking and with the handful of people watching from the wharf giving an occasional wave, the great, grey ship slowly pulled out into the harbour whilst a military band played *The Maori's Farewell*.

*For now is the hour
When we must say goodbye
Soon you'll be sailing
Far across the sea
While you're away
Oh please remember me
And when you return
You'll find me waiting here.*

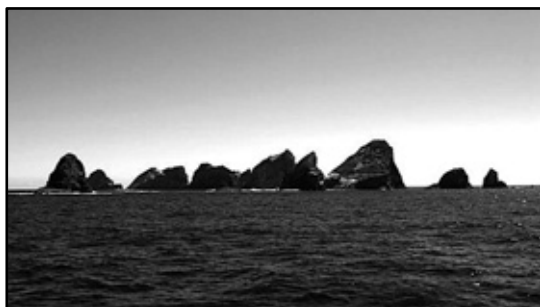
It was a sad and haunting tune and a far cry from the military bands playing martial airs, the flags and the cheering crowds which farewelled soldiers in earlier wars. I was certainly not the only one who felt desolate and found it hard to hold back a tear.

As the ship moved down the wide estuary of the Derwent I stood on the deck straining, in the gathering darkness, for my last view of Australia. There were some 100 aircrew in the detachment. Of that eager lot only about twenty were to return at the end of the war. However, even if we had known that, we would, with the certainty of youth, have been sure, each of us, that we would be among the survivors.

Life on troopships is always uncomfortable — the food is usually poor and conditions very cramped. The only distractions are walking around the deck and gambling — the inevitable activity of any gathering of troops. For hours on end we played poker, pontoon, five hundred, bridge, etc., not to win money, but simply to while away the time.

On the *Ile de France* we were each assigned to one of the gun crews of the ship and I found myself part of two four hour watches each day on the forward six inch gun. In charge was an old Royal

Navy petty officer who trained us to operate the gun and enlivened the long, boring hours with a flow of incredible stories about his life in the navy and the many squalid affairs he had had in half the ports of the world. At night it was cold and miserable on the gun platform with the strong breeze made by the ship travelling at high speed and occasional spray breaking over the bow. But, just after dawn three days later, as I stood on the platform, I saw my first foreign landfall — the Three Kings, the great spires of rock at the northern tip of New Zealand. I felt, quite literally, thrilled. Always I had wanted to travel and, at long last, I was seeing another country.



The Three Kings Islands, New Zealand. They were named in 1643 by Abel Tasman. They are known as the Manawa Islands by the Maori.

After a couple of days in Auckland — which I thought was rather like Brisbane — we sailed for Hawaii. Ten days later the incredibly green slopes and purple mountains of Oahu came out of the morning mist. We gazed excitedly as the ship slowly eased into Pearl Harbour where almost a year before the Japanese had made their dramatic entry into the war.



The keel of the Battleship USS Oklahoma sunk with the loss of 415 crew on 6 December 1941. This was the sight that greeted Arthur as he arrived at Pearl Harbour.

The signs of battle were everywhere — great heaps of broken aircraft, blackened buildings and, most dramatic of all, the upturned battleships of the American Pacific Fleet which had been moored in ‘Battleship Row.’

The arrival of the *Ile de France* was itself an event. The huge ship circled Ford Island and was then pushed slowly into the wharf by a number of tugs. But they pushed for too long and the ship was reluctant to stop when it touched the wharf. Under the momentum of the push the 44,000 tons proceeded, among great cracks and bangs, to smash the timbers of the wharf and, as the ship began to lean threateningly over on its port side, the welcoming band, grass skirted hula dancers and spectators ran wildly from what appeared to be imminent disaster.

To our dismay we were not allowed ashore but I soon ceased to worry over this as I felt increasingly unwell. As the ship left port I went to the doctor, was told that I had mumps and was at once put to bed in the ship's hospital with three fellow sufferers. Most of the other patients were German prisoners, one of them suffering from diphtheria. There were two doctors — one a fanatical Nazi and the other an utterly useless RAAF officer who was totally uninterested in his patients and spent most of his time pursuing two American Army nurses who were being sent home from the Solomon's for misbehaviour. There was no attempt to segregate patients with infectious diseases. The young German with diphtheria grew progressively worse. His bed was opposite mine and I watched him die slowly, gasping for breath and almost untended. It was the first time I had seen anyone die and I found it an unpleasant reminder of my own mortality.

When the ship docked in San Francisco the four sufferers from mumps were transferred to the Letterman General Hospital, run by the United States Army. Here the treatment was highly professional and we recovered rapidly. The only threatening item was the American soldier in the next cubicle who was dying of tertiary syphilis who continually moaned and occasionally screamed.



The spread of VD was a major issue for the Allies (and all combatants for that matter) as troops infected with VD could not fight. Large numbers of men were incapacitated and took considerable resources to cure. In addition, it caused morale problems on the home front if soldiers returned from war suffering from VD. Free condoms were handed out to all soldiers and health clinics were available in all major cities visited by troops on leave.

Afterwards, I had no need to see the films that were shown to the troops to warn them about venereal disease!

As soon as I recovered I was sent to the American Army transit camp, *Fort McDowell*, on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. Not without significance, it was one ferry stop beyond the great prison island of Alcatraz, then still occupied and full of menace with its walls, towers and barbed wire. It is said that troops often dislike their allies more than their enemies and my first encounter with the U.S. forces *en masse* did little to make me love them. Great bleak concrete barracks where you had to watch your belongings closely, sleeping on a bunk surrounded by 100 men, coughing, smoking, gambling and swearing, I found quite depressing. But this was nothing to the eating arrangements.

The mess hall was a great building with numerous bolted doors around it. Before meal time hundreds of soldiers would surround it. A siren would blow, the doors would be flung open simultaneously and the men would pour in, sitting at the first vacant bench. The food was already set on the table and there was no question of deciding what to eat. Each man just ate whatever was on that part of the table opposite to him — soup if he sat in front of the soup, sausages if they

were near him and so on. Within three or four minutes the first man would be leaving the hall, wiping his mouth.



A typical US Army mess hall — crowded, noisy and smelly.



Inside the derelict Fort McDowell mess in 2010. At the height of the war it served 310,000 meals per month.

I had never seen, nor imagined, such piggery and I would have starved in a few days if I had not been able to buy food at the canteen. A few days later I was greatly relieved to be told that I was to be sent to Britain, even though I had hardly any kit. My gear had gone off with that of the remainder of the draft and I was left with the clothes I stood in plus a few items I managed to buy from American troops who had lost their money gambling. It all fitted into a small suitcase so I travelled light.

In late 1942 there was no question of flying across the Atlantic so I crossed the United States by train. When the express of the Southern Pacific Railroad, headed by a huge Pacific class steam locomotive, pulled out of Oakland station with much hissing and panting and tolling of the bell I could hardly have been more excited. Over the next four days and nights America passed before my wide-open eyes in a series of unforgettable images. The wonderful, jagged and snow covered peaks of the Sierra Nevadas; the great rolling hills of the Rockies, so different from what I had imagined; miles of timber sheds over the single track line to keep it free of snow; the bleakness of Cheyenne in mid-winter; the street lights in Chicago in the middle of the day, a foot of slush and ropes rigged for pedestrians on the bitter streets; the lovely valley of the Hudson River in the early

morning and the great crowds at Grand Central Station in New York.

A few days in New York — time enough to go up the Empire State building and see a can-can at a nightclub — then late one afternoon to the East Side Docks. The ship turned out to be a pre-war Dutch liner of some 15,000 tons, which had already seen hard service as a trooper. Now, in New York, it was filled with American and Canadian soldiers, most of them from inland states who had never seen the sea. They, poor devils, were put in the holds where the tiers of bunks were several stories high. As a lone airman from Australia I was put with the few British troops on board and had the luxury of being able to sleep on a table — in my clothes, of course, because we were not allowed to get undressed.



The top bunk was considered the best place to be as it was free of others clambering up to reach their bunk, but most importantly, it was safe from soldiers being unexpectedly sea sick.

The eighteen day voyage was really horrible. It was the middle of December and freezing cold. Water was limited to one full mug per man per day for all purposes, including shaving. Food was very short and probably the worst I have ever had to eat. However, a special effort was made on Christmas Day when we each received a cube of whale meat which oozed fat, two roast potatoes and a dollop — for that is the right word — of boiled cabbage from which a stream of bright green water spread across the plate. For dessert we were lucky enough to be given a two inch square of chocolate pudding made on water and liberally doused in custard also made on water.

We sailed from New York at night and when I came on deck the

next morning I found that our ship was part of a great convoy moving slowly to the north at a speed of only eight knots. I could see two other troopships but the rest of the convoy seemed to be made up of freighters and tankers. I had no doubt that we would be an attractive target for the U-boat wolf packs which, still unbeaten, made the North Atlantic a very perilous place.



A North Atlantic convoy forming up near Nova Scotia ready for the slow 'dash' across the Atlantic.

Plodding slowly up the coast of Nova Scotia, the long lines of dark ships stretched as far as the eye could see. Then the weather worsened and soon a heavy gale was blowing, scattering the convoy far and wide. The seas were mountainous and the ship pitched and rolled in a way, which frightened those troops who were not seasick. The seasick majority just wanted to die. Most of those who still had control of their stomachs were living in my mess which was near the centre of the ship and relatively uncrowded. Down in the holds the scene was almost indescribable; thousands of men being violently ill, the overwhelming stench of vomit and the sound of curses and moans. As Orderly Sergeant, I went along with the Orderly Officer, opened the bulkhead door, yelled “Orderly Officer, any complaints?” was nauseated by the smell and then we fled together.

The storm slowly abated, the convoy reformed and we proceeded at a snail’s pace towards Britain. Like everyone else on board I was acutely aware of the perils of the crossing for we frequently passed the debris of war — a smashed lifeboat, broken boxes and parts of ships — but this seemed only to increase the

vitality of some of the American officers on board. The deck became covered with ice but this failed to stop some of them making love to WAACs on blankets on the deck. I was not disgusted — just amazed. I spent most of my time wandering around with my lifejacket which would have been useless in the seas — and thinking how long it was to the next meal.

The long lines of ships slowly rolled their way towards the Greenland Strait between Iceland and Greenland without much excitement until one afternoon the convoy was attacked by U-boats. My ship was right at the tail of the convoy and was the one attacked. We were very lucky as the torpedo missed, passing close under the counter stern. There was a great flurry of excitement, lifebelts were donned and I went to my boat station. I could see depth charges exploding on the port wing of the convoy and I watched in awe as a British destroyer came past, heading at full speed into the great swells and taking them green over the bows. I do not know what losses occurred in the convoy but much later I found that this was one of the last convoys to be attacked by a 'wolf pack.' Early in 1943 the tide in the submarine war finally turned and the hunters became the hunted.



A depth charge attack on a submarine by the USS Spencer in 1943.

After the attack our ship moved into the centre of the convoy. However, we did not stay there long for, on the next day, the engines broke down and the convoy went on without us. The weather was

calm and the ship lay rolling in an ocean suddenly empty of ships while much clanging told us that the engine room crew was toiling furiously to make repairs. Everyone had to wear a life jacket and all noise was kept to a minimum. We knew that we were a sitting duck for any passing U-boat but they had gone on to follow the convoy and we were left unmolested.

After nearly twenty-four tense hours the engines trembled to life again and the ship raced ahead at sixteen knots to catch up the convoy. A few days later, when I woke up, I suddenly realised that the ship had stopped rolling and was steady. As soon as I came on deck I saw, to my delight, in the pale morning light of a northern winter, the green slopes of the Firth of Clyde on either side and knew that, for a time at least, I was safe.

I was no doubt dirty and I am sure that I smelled badly after eighteen days without a wash but I didn't notice it because everyone else was in the same condition. It was only when I arrived in London the following morning and had a long luxurious bath at the Union Jack Club at Waterloo station that I realised what a luxury it is to be able to keep clean.

I had to pinch myself to believe that I was actually in London! Here was Piccadilly, here was the Haymarket, there was Pall Mall! Not that it was a glamorous place in the dying days of 1942. There were still occasional air raids, all windows were taped to prevent shattering, there was a blackout and even the traffic lights were reduced to small crosses. The entrances to many buildings were sandbagged, most of the traffic consisted of taxis and military vehicles and there was little to buy in the shops without coupons. But the theatres were open, it was still possible to eat reasonably well and the thousands of troops on leave — British, American, Australian, Polish, Dutch and many others — found it exciting. The pubs did a roaring trade and, in the evenings, the prostitutes were wall to wall around Piccadilly Circus. With the Germans and Japanese in retreat everyone believed that the tide of war had finally turned in favour of the Allies and there was an undeniable optimism in the London air.

The reception depot for Australian and New Zealand aircrew was in the expensive seaside resort of Bournemouth on the south coast and there I spent the next three months living in a requisitioned hotel, attending lectures and waiting impatiently to get on with the war.

The war made a brief appearance when, one morning, ten FW190s came in low over the sea to make a hit and run raid. It was all over in a few minutes with little damage done and we were pleased to learn that the very alert ground defences shot six of them down.



The Focke Wulf 190 was one of the Luftwaffe's most successful aircraft. Over 20,000 were built during the war. The raid mentioned by Arthur was much more severe than he was told at the time. Twenty-five FW-190s were involved in the raid on 23 May 1943 against Bournemouth. One may have been shot down and there were seventy-seven civilian deaths, 196 civilians treated in hospital and 131 military deaths. Obviously these figures were considered too high to tell the local populace.

Every Sunday there was a church parade. Those who were determinedly Christian went off to their respective churches. The heathen remainder were then taken on a route march around the town. The column, in ranks of three, stepped out bravely but, as soon as it turned a corner, the last two or three ranks melted away. By the